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For My Mother

Louise Gluck

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THE POND

Night covers the pond with its wing.
Under the ringed moon I can make out
Your face swimming among minnows and the **small**
Echoing stars. In the night air
The surface of the pond is metal.

Within, your eyes are open. They contain
A memory I recognize, as though
We had been children together. Our ponies
Grazed on the hill, they were gray
With white markings. Now they graze
With the dead who wait
Like children under their granite breastplates,
Lucid and helpless:

The hills are far away. They rise up
Blacker than childhood.
What do you think of, lying so quietly
By the water? When you look that way
I want to touch you, but
Do not, seeing
As in another life we were of the same **blood**.

FOR MY MOTHER

It was better when we were
together in one body.
Thirty years. Screened
through the green glass
of your eye, moonlight
filtered into my bones
as we lay
in the big bed, in the dark,
waiting for my father.
Thirty years. He closed
your eyelids with

two kisses. And then spring
came and withdrew from me
the absolute
knowledge of the unborn
leaving the brick stoop
where you stand, shading
your eyes, but
it is night, the moon
is stationed in the beechtree
round and white among
the small tin markers of the stars:
Thirty years. A marsh grows up
around the house. Schools of spores
circulate behind the shades, drift
through gauze flutterings of vegetation.

Gemini

Stanley Plumly

I don't want to begin like a reviewer—because my intent is to try to touch something essential in these three poems and then get off the page—but let me go on like one for just a moment: Louise Glück has always been a poet of severity, constriction and obsession. If *Firstborn*, her one book to date, represents a sequence of high-powered concentrations of psychic energy, in which both the emphatic rhythms and rhymes serve to intensify the needs of the speaking voice—usually one of several personae—then the three poems here illustrate not only an alteration of method, but an augmentation of matter. The brilliant rhetorical bias of the early poems tends to restrict their emotional range: experience is more often judged than revealed; the possibility for ambiguity more often anticipated than realized. The new poems, however, are much more open to emotional alternatives. They bear none of the burden of language acting under certain prescriptive tests and expectations. And they are written in the singular and personal voice of the poet. The obsessions remain, but they are now so limited to the egocentricity of a persona. End of school.

What I find so moving in these poems is the authority of their “absolute knowledge”: since the present must be at best provisional, it's in the potential of the past that we find our lives. This sounds Proustian, of course, like saying that all poems are poems of memory—recollected, in this case, in anxiety. But the paradox animates these poems. They meditate, as well as mediate, over terrifying denials, yet the very presence of their language depends on a primary confrontation